



Van H. Wanggaard

Wisconsin State Senator

TESTIMONY ON SENATE BILL 18

Thank you Mr. Chairman and committee members, for this hearing on Senate Bill 18. Senate Bill 18 is a bi-partisan bill that will provide health insurance protection for the immediate family of police officers killed in the line of duty. The bill is modeled on a similar bill for the immediate family of firefighters, which passed the Senate and Assembly on a voice vote last session.

Police officers are the first line of defense in Wisconsin. They work tirelessly to ensure the safety of Wisconsin citizens. They risk their lives every day. They are expected to be pillars of our community, and they deserve to be treated as such.

We are fortunate in this state that we have had few police officers killed in the line of duty in the last several of years. As I am sure you are aware, we will be honoring those who have made that sacrifice this Friday. This year, unfortunately, one name will be added to that memorial. There are few heroes, and they deserve our recognition, our thanks and our support.

Allow me to be clear this bill is not about Craig Birkholz. Senate Bill 18 was introduced before his tragic death. Officer Birkholz gave the ultimate sacrifice to protect the lives of his fellow officers while responding to a civil disturbance. Officer Birkholz reacted to his training and instruction to protect life. Officer Birkholz left a family behind who may or may not be protected by health coverage at the worst possible time of their lives.

As a former Racine police officer for almost thirty years, I know first hand the dangers that many officers face. An officer entering a situation has many thoughts going through their mind. Evaluating the tactical situation, considering public safety, and negotiation strategies are all of critical importance. The last thing an officer needs to be worrying about is whether or not their family will be protected coverage if something bad should happen to them.

The bill requires a town, city or village that pays health insurance premiums for police officers to provide health care protection for the spouse and dependent children for an officer who dies or has died in the line of duty. The benefits continue until the spouse remarries or turns 65 years of age. Coverage of dependent children generally continues until age 18 or later depending on the children's educational status.

The Department of Revenue estimates from now until 2026 the projected costs of this bill could be between \$500,000 and \$1,000,000. But the fiscal estimate evaluates long term costs of this legislation – not its yearly costs. This is a fiscal estimate over time.

As I attended the home town funeral of Officer Birkholz with Senator Wirsch, we witnessed the outpouring of several thousand police officers and members of the community. This was second only to the nearly 10,000 people in attendance at the Fond du Lac service honoring our fallen hero.

I ask for your support in passing this bill to protect the families of those few heroes who make the ultimate sacrifice that others may live. Thank you.

Serving Racine County - Senate District 21



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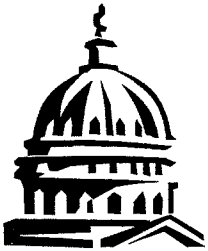
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To: Senate Committee on Insurance and Housing
From: Curt Witynski, Assistant Director, League of Wisconsin Municipalities
Date: May 3, 2011
Re: Opposition to SB 18

The League of Wisconsin Municipalities opposes SB 18, mandating that municipalities pay the health insurance premiums for dependents of police officers killed in the line of duty. While we deeply respect and honor the brave men and woman police officers serving our cities and villages, we believe this issue is better left to collective bargaining at the local level. Many municipalities may or already have agreed to cover the health insurance costs of the surviving family members of police officers killed in action. The point is, this is a matter for local officials to work out with their police force.

The state is overly fond of imposing costly mandates on local governments while at the same time cutting state shared revenue and strictly limiting our ability to raise property taxes. We note that the bill applies retroactively. The Department of Revenue estimates that the total cost of this requirement may exceed \$1 million by 2026.

We urge you to vote against recommending passage of SB 83 on the grounds that it unnecessarily interferes with local control. Thanks for considering our comments.



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Representative Spanbauer's Support for SB 18

Thank you, Chairman Lasee and members, for the opportunity to speak today in favor of Senate Bill 18. My name is Matt Pulda, and I am the research assistant for Rep. Dick Spanbauer. Representative Spanbauer was unable to attend this morning's hearing personally, so he asked me to speak on his behalf.

Last session, the Legislature passed Senate Bill 520—2009 Act 285—which requires municipalities that pay healthcare premiums for firefighters to continue to pay premiums for a firefighter's surviving spouse and dependent children if the firefighter dies in the line of duty. SB 520 enjoyed bipartisan support, which it should have.

As the Legislature considered SB 520, Representative Spanbauer wondered why a similar provision was not made for the families of law enforcement officers who die in the line of duty, and earlier this year he circulated what became Assembly Bill 27, which takes 2009 Act 285 and applies it to the surviving families of municipal and county law enforcement officers. Sen. Bob Jauch's office then approached our office to say the Senator had been considering a similar proposal, and our offices joined with Sen. Van Wanggaard to introduce SB 18. Both SB 18 and AB 27 have received bipartisan support, which the Representative greatly appreciates.

Local law enforcement officers put their lives on the line for our communities every day, and providing a safety net for their families is the right thing to do. Although deaths in the line of duty rarely happen in Wisconsin, the important thing is that they do happen. In fact, only a few weeks after SB 18 and AB 27 were introduced, a member of the Fond du Lac Police Department, Officer Craig Berkholz, was shot and killed in the course of responding to a sexual assault complaint, and a fellow officer was seriously wounded. Officer Berkholz left behind a young widow, and SB 18 would protect her, as it applies retroactively to eligible survivors. Again, it is the right thing to do.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman and members, for this opportunity to share Representative Spanbauer's support for SB 18.

Date: May 4, 2011

From: Robert Wierenga, Executive Director of the Wisconsin County Police Association

To: Chairman Lasee and Members of the Senate Committee on Insurance and Housing

Re: Support for Senate Bill 18

Good morning and thank you for giving me a few moments to speak in support of Senate Bill 18.

My name is Robert Wierenga and I am the Executive Director of the Wisconsin County Police Association. We represent 3100 members serving in Sheriff's Departments across the state.

I experienced my first "line of duty death" in 1973 when I lost my best friend who was shot and killed in response to an armed robbery. One year later I lost a friend who was killed when his squad car was broadsided by a vehicle that failed to stop at a red light. As the Executive Director of WCPA I personally present "line of duty" death benefit checks to the survivors of fallen officers across Wisconsin. I see first hand the trauma and devastation a line of duty death has on families and departments.

From May 15 through May 21 we will be observing National Police Week and will be honoring those who died in the line of duty - 162 men and women across the country in 2010. Recognizing, remembering, and reflecting on the deaths of those who served proudly and gave their all. In Washington D.C. and around the country families of those who suffered a loss will be meeting to share in their grief, loss, and for some a time of confusion and abandonment.

Survivors can tell you about the fear and stress they faced as they tried to move forward. Survivors often question how will they make it in the future? Am I going to lose everything? How will I be able to care for my family?

One of the most devastating blows to survivors is the loss of health insurance. Survivors may be excluded from the departments' health insurance program within days of an officer's death. In many case survivors are notified by mail leaving a survivor who is still dealing with the loss of a loved one scurrying about in an attempt to find health insurance.

SB 18 addresses one of the many issues facing a family who has tragically and suddenly lost a loved one while serving his or her community. Your support of this bill will go a long way in helping survivors "get better not bitter!"

WISCONSIN PROFESSIONAL POLICE ASSOCIATION

MEMORANDUM

TO: Members of the Senate Committee on Insurance and Housing

FROM: Jim Palmer, Executive Director
Wisconsin Professional Police Association

DATE: May 4, 2011

RE: 2011 Senate Bill 18; Covering Health Insurance for Spouses and Dependents of Law Enforcement Officers That Are Killed in Action

With nearly 11,000 members, the Wisconsin Professional Police Association (WPPA) is the state's largest law enforcement organization. Our mission is to protect and promote public safety, as well as the interests of the dedicated men and women who serve to provide it. The WPPA genuinely appreciates this opportunity to offer our ardent support to 2011 Senate Bill 18, which would require local governments to provide health insurance to the spouses and dependents of law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty.

Though infrequent, some officers make the ultimate sacrifice in their efforts to keep us safe. In the wake of a tragedy like this, a family can be left to grieve and to fend for themselves to cover their health insurance needs that are no longer provided to them. Senate Bill 18 covers these rare and tragic circumstances, and recognizes that, while an officer wears a badge; their service to their communities is not a solitary endeavor. Indeed, the law enforcement profession is one that requires the extraordinary support of loved ones who share a dedication and commitment to our common security.

While Senate Bill 18 undoubtedly amounts to an unfunded mandate that would cause a fiscal impact, we as a society should do everything we can to care for those that have lost the support of a loved one who died while working to keep our streets safe. Senate Bill 18 not only gives officers some measure of peace in knowing that their loved ones will have health insurance, but it recognizes that the safety of our communities not only requires dedicated men and women in uniform, but also the families who watch them depart to fulfill their duty each and every day.

Given the foregoing, the WPPA respectfully requests that this committee approved this measure as soon as possible.

Thank you for your consideration.